

Beyond the American Pale: The Irish in the West, 1845–1910

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ing to do further research in the history of western capital punishment, but it cannot substitute for more serious scholarly approaches to the history of criminal justice in the American West.

Beyond the American Pale: The Irish in the West, 1845–1910, by David M. Emmons. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010. viii, 472 pp. Tables, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. \$34.95 cloth.

Reviewer R. Douglas Hurt is professor and head of the Department of History at Purdue University. His most recent book is *The Great Plains during World War II* (2008).

Irish immigration to the United States fostered social, economic, and political change in many cities. The great trauma born of British land policy and famine drove approximately five million Irish from their homeland between 1845 and 1910. They were poor and unskilled, and they considered themselves exiles, not willing immigrants. Most important, they were Catholic. Native-born Protestants resented them and relegated them to near the bottom of the social and economic scale. In turn, the Irish did not trust the American-born Anglo-Saxon Protestants. As a result, each group contested for social, economic, and political space and power wherever large numbers of Irish lived.

This story is well known. But another story about the Irish has been little told until now. David Emmons, who has written about Irish miners in Butte, Montana, has expanded his historical vision to encompass the role of the Irish in the settlement of the American West. He admits that relatively few Irish moved west, usually after a brief stop somewhere else after arriving in the United States. They sought any job that offered security and stability, if not prosperity, and they kept to themselves. In tracing their part in the history of the American West, Emmons asks important, penetrating questions about where they went, what they did, and how they fared, particularly in relation to their self-identity as Irish. Emmons also traces the ways the Irish immigrants differed from other immigrants and the effect of western settlement on Irish women. The Irish were always more feared than welcomed, and they always thought of themselves as Catholics and Irish in that order, with loyalty to local-based identity founded on counties and towns rather than the nation-state of Ireland. They looked backward rather than forward. In this context, the West was not a land of new beginnings but a place in which to hold on.

Emmons's West includes the midwestern states of Minnesota, Michigan, Wisconsin, Nebraska, and Iowa, with a passing nod to the Irish in Kansas and the Dakotas, but his emphasis is the Far West, in-

cluding Oklahoma and Texas. Geographical limits, particularly when used for social parameters, can be difficult to craft, but Emmons's eastern boundary is arguable. Probably Indiana and possibly Illinois should have been included, given the rich manuscript collections on the rural Irish available for those states.

Emmons does not tread the well-worn and often misleading discussion about how the Irish became white, that is, accepted into American society on a variety of levels, including work and wages. He clearly states that the Irish considered themselves white. Religion, not race or even ethnicity, governed their lives, and the Catholic church served as their social and cultural anchor. In the West, the Irish became both more and less Irish as they clung to old traditions and embraced an economic independence never experienced in Ireland. In the process, they established agricultural communities, such as Melrose, Iowa; provided the workforce for mining towns; and dominated Democratic politics in San Francisco. As disinherited émigrés, they took care of themselves and created their own ethnocentric West.

Emmons bases his study on three beliefs: first, that culture matters; second, that religion is a fundamental component of culture; and, third, that there are significant differences between Catholics and Protestants. These markers can be traced fairly easily until about 1910, when it becomes more difficult to trace the Irish in the population census and after which issues other than settlement and assimilation — such as Irish American nationalism, the Irish labor movement, and Irish-British quarrels — changed their focus and concerns. For the 65 years he covers, Emmons gives readers much to contemplate.

Overall, Emmons has written a social and intellectual history of the Irish in the West between 1845 and 1910 designed for specialists in immigration, social, and ethnic as well as western history. It can also serve as a useful reference for select topics. Iowa readers will find his discussion of the Irish community of Melrose instructive about its cultural isolation, agricultural foundation, and people who kept close track of British oppression in Ireland. The appendix also lists the towns in Iowa that contributed funds to support Irish nationalism. Emmons has written a thoughtful, extensively researched, significant book about the Irish in the American West. This is the work of a senior scholar who knows his field and who has something to say.